



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1949.

NEW PAY SET-UP ANNOUNCED FOR FUR-SEAL ISLANDERS

A change in the method of compensating the resident Aleut natives of the Pribilof Islands for their work in connection with the conservation and use of the fur-seal resource of the Pribilofs was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman. The plan becomes effective January 1, 1950. The fur seal project is under the supervision of the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service.

The compensation plan for the resident Aleut workmen is designed to provide year-around wage payments and incentive bonuses for taking fur-seal and fox pelts which, when coupled with allowances in kind, will constitute fair compensation for services rendered. Not only for actual sealing operations but other labor performed throughout the year.

The plan approved by Assistant Secretary Warne on December 23 will pave the way for the gradual transition from payment in allotment of necessities plus cash to straight cash compensation. As an initial step in this direction the Aleut workmen in the skilled and semi-skilled wage categories will be required during the first year of the plan to purchase their fuel supplies from their cash earnings instead of drawing a government ration.

The plan also provides annual and sick leave benefits, and before long it is intended that retirement and disability benefits will be added. For the present, Aleut workmen will continue to receive as part of their compensation the other necessities of life plus educational health and recreational facilities. The value of these issues and benefits is conservatively estimated at more than \$900 for each workman. Cash payments will amount to about \$1,700 a year for foremen, \$1,400 to \$1,600 for skilled workers, \$1,000 to \$1,400 for semi-skilled workmen, \$700 to \$1,000 for unskilled laborers, and \$30 to \$40 a month for boys employed during the summer sealing season.

The details of the new plan have been in preparation for more than two years. The compensation proposals were studied last fall by a special committee formed to investigate the living conditions of Alaska native groups in the Bering Sea area. In considering the plan, the committee announced at the same time that the Pribilof natives enjoyed a standard of living unsurpassed by other native Alaskan communities.

The Pribilof Islands are the summer breeding grounds for approximately 3,000,000 Alaska fur seals. The 525 Aleut inhabitants of these Islands are descendents of the

Aleutian Islands natives originally transported by the Russians to St. Paul Island and St. George Island of the Pribilof group to exploit the fur-seal herd. The fur-seal industry is the only source of livelihood for these people.

Through careful management, the Alaska fur-seal herd has been restored to a high level of abundance. Since 1945 an average annual take of 70,000 pelts has been obtained on the Pribilof Islands, and the net income of the United States Treasury from this source has exceeded \$1,000,000 each year.

x x x